

Ed Studies Newsletter

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Dr. Stokes

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Alumni Spotlight: Dr. Carmen Stokes

Dr. Carmen Stokes was the first student to graduate from the Educational Studies program. She is currently an Associate Professor at University of Detroit Mercy (UDM) where she teaches Professional Issues in Nursing, Fundamentals in Nursing, Medical-Surgical Nursing, and Community Nursing. Dr. Stokes is a committed educator who is “passionate about teaching, passionate about nursing, and passionate about the ways students learn.” In addition to being a member of UDM faculty, she sits on several community boards, contributing to efforts around public health, cardiovascular health, and the nutrition and fitness of children. She has been recognized for her contributions to her field and was awarded the Oakland University of Nursing: Nightingale Nursing Excellence

Award (Research & Education Runner-up).

Prior to enrolling in the program, Dr. Stokes was an Assistant Professor, but explains that her coursework helped “refine my work.” She adds, “I enjoyed the entire program, especially the interdisciplinary aspect and having the conversation with colleagues across disciplines.” Dr. Stokes’ (2013) dissertation was titled *The Lived Experience of African American Nurses Who Attended Predominantly White University Baccalaureate Programs: Characteristics of Success and Resilience*. In the acknowledgements she wrote, “I thoroughly enjoyed my doctoral experience. This program embraced me and my thoughts, acknowledged them as valid and important to the discipline, and gave me the tools to critically evaluate

urban education and its impact on nursing.” She was awarded the Black Graduate Student Dissertation Presentation of the Year.

Dr. Stokes offers some advice to current cohort members as they navigate their educational journeys. Firstly, she prompts us, “Try to enjoy it, make sure that you answer YOUR question- what you are interested in personally so you can maintain your stamina.” She also advises, “Pace yourself, try to have work-life balance and remember why you want your PhD.” Dr. Stokes has been a model of self-discipline and success. She has shared her research in the program’s qualitative methods course and offered valuable guidance on the process. We appreciate Dr. Stokes’ sharing of her experiences and reflections upon the development of the program.

Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Studies

The Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Studies prepares educators from a variety of community organizations (P-12 schools, higher education and other community contexts) to engage in effective research and practice about teaching and learning within complex social, political and economic systems. A key underlying emphasis of the program is a focus on poverty and its specific impact on urban, as well as suburban and rural communities.

Kudos and Congratulations!

Dr. Ethan Lowenstein received the Champion of Engagement Award at the [Michigan Campus Compact Awards Gala](#)

Dr. Celeste Hawkins (cohort 1) received both the Provost's New Faculty Award and the Summer Research/Creative Activity Award for Summer 2016 at Eastern Michigan University

Heather Nicolson-Bester (ABD, cohort 4) and **Chloe Wilson** (ABD, cohort 5) received the Scholar of Excellence Award



Cristal Nichols,
PhD Candidate

Research Focus: Cristal Nichols

Cristal Nichols, a PhD candidate from the Educational Studies program, is in the final stages of her dissertation research. According to Cristal her research began to take shape the moment she walked into Dr. Valerie Polakow's *Children and Families and Poverty* course. She reflects, "I realized that the hypothetical life journey she took us on as graduate students was one I had already navigated as a young, single African American, teenage mother...the course helped me to place my own life's journey in a political, societal, and economic framework I had never considered before." She adds, "I viewed my life's journey through my transformed lens." Her research interests solidified during her qualitative methods courses, and Cristal's research seeks to identify the facilitators and barriers to low-income, first year, African-American female college students in order to explore the meaning of academic optimism in relation to their school lives. Cristal attributes her focus of 'academic optimism' to Dr. Wendy Burke who introduced her to the concept. Cristal's use of qualitative methods is a unique approach to exploring this construct, and her conversations with Dr. Burke were "a pivotal moment" in

directing her research intentions.

Cristal's research has not been without its challenges, but she has remained steadfast in her vision. Her focus is on capturing the experiences of first-year students, so she only included participants with less than thirty credit hours. She says it was difficult to find participants and stay committed to this criterion but adds that staying faithful to her focus "brought authenticity to the participants' narratives." She also expounds, "One aspect of the research I was not expecting was how open and honest the research participants were." She stresses that she is "determined to be a vehicle for their voices to be heard." Cristal has already presented some of her work at the Annual Ethnographic and Qualitative Research Conference (2016).

Cristal argues that the strongest aspect of Educational Studies program is the "camaraderie" made possible through a cohort model. She adds, "I have met some amazing people, who are all on this educational journey with me. We will forever be linked through this experience." We wish Cristal well as she finishes her writing process and are looking forward to Cristal's dissertation defense in the coming months.

Conference Corner

American Educational Studies
Association

[CFP](#) May 1, 2016 deadline

American Educational Research
Association

[CFP](#) July TBD deadline

[International Conference on Critical
Education](#) August 10-13, 2016
Middlesex University, London, UK

[Literacy Research Association](#)
November 30-December 3
Nashville, Tennessee

Reminder: Complete your annual review to submit to your advisor. Refer to the [student handbook](#) for more information.

Five Years of the EcoJustice and Activism Conference by Monica Shields

The [EcoJustice and Activism Conference](#) brings together the voices of activists, teachers, students, and academics around a shared vision of interdependence and the alleviation of social and ecological suffering. The conference attracts an international audience and was attended by approximately 200 people this year. Dr. John Lupinacci, alumni of the Educational Studies PhD program, initiated the first EcoJustice and Activism Conference as part of his internship requirement. Monica Shields (ABD, cohort 3) has also completed her internship through the EcoJustice and Activism Conference by organizing a luncheon for conference attendees using community donations and six local business donors.

The intention of this year's theme, Reclaiming the Commons: Diverse Ways of Being and Knowing, was to discuss the importance of vastly diverse commons practices, their relations, and their histories across the planet. Preconference events included a multi-day meditation retreat and a bus tour of Detroit. There were almost 40 presentations, including 9 alternative and 4 keynote presentations. Three of the presentations were given off-site and live-streamed for conference attendees. Two of these were by Finnish graduate students at the University of Tampere. Incoming, current, and alumni Educational Studies students presented the following papers at the conference:

- Kaia-Marie A. Bishop (cohort 6): "Welfare Reform in the US and Canada: A Comparative Analysis"
- Nigora Erkaeva (ABD, cohort 4): "The Erosion of Love: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Soviet Compulsory Education in Central Asia"
- Kristi George (ABD, cohort 1): "Rethinking Nursing Education for Healthy Communities"
- Veronica Konglim (cohort 5): "The Knowledge of My Mother is My Knowledge: Conversations on Place, Membership and Tradition"
- Agnes Krynski (incoming student, cohort 8): "Reconceptualizing a Language Curriculum from an EcoJustice Framework: Teaching Key Concepts Through *The Little Prince*"
- Dr. John Lupinacci (alumni, cohort 1): "Imagining 'Community,' Confronting 'Normalcy': Perceptions of (Dis)Ability, the Environment, and Inclusion"
- Amanda O. Maher (cohort 6): "The 'War on Illiteracy': Voices from the Trenches"
- John Mullen (cohort 7): "The Speculative Turn: Reflections on Education, Ethics, and Ecology"
- Monica K. Shields (ABD, cohort 3): "Teaching for Love Through Pedagogies of Responsibility: Translating EcoJustice Theory into Practice"
- Yasmin Snounu (cohort 6): "Environmental Issues, Water Resources and Women in the Middle East: An Ecofeminist Analysis"



Dr. Valerie Polakow

Dr. Valerie Polakow, a much admired educator, advocate, and scholar, will be retiring at the end of August. A member of the founding faculty who developed the Educational Studies PhD program, Dr. Polakow also worked in collaboration with colleagues to develop the Qualitative Methods courses and Children and Families in Poverty course. She is the co-coordinator of the Educational Studies PhD program, as well as a professor of educational psychology, early childhood education, and educational studies. For nearly 30 years, Dr. Polakow has worked in the Department of Teacher Education while conducting research to bring attention to the oppression and marginalization of children and families living in poverty. Her staunch defense of human rights and the inherent dignity of all people has helped her students to understand the value of voice, the power of solidarity, and the ethical responsibilities of the scholar.

A prolific writer, Dr. Polakow's publications span 7 books, numerous book chapters, peer-reviewed articles, policy briefs, and reports. Notable books include *Lives on the Edge: Single Mothers and their Children in the Other America* (1993), *Who Cares for Our Children? The Child Care Crisis in the Other America* (2007), and her edited book *The Public Assault on America's Children: Poverty, Violence, and Juvenile Injustice* (2000). In addition to national and international conference presentations, Dr. Polakow has been invited to speak about her research around the country, as well as internationally. She was a visiting professor at the University of Edinburgh and a Fulbright scholar in Denmark. Dr. Polakow has regularly presented her research at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) annual conference and in 2010 was awarded the Distinguished Contributions to Gender Equity Award followed by the Critical Perspectives on Early Childhood Education Distinguished Career Contribution Award in 2015 by AERA.

Those of us in the Educational Studies program know Dr. Polakow for more than her impressive list of accomplishments over her career. We admire her for her kindness, grace, and unwavering commitment to students. She has helped us to grow as writers, researchers, and developing scholars. We were so fortunate to have her in this program. Dr. Polakow will be greatly missed, and we wish her the best in her retirement.